

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN ASIA

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Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to the audience here. Malaysia has gone through a very furious transition. I was the leader for 22 years of the government party which ruled Malaysia for 61 years.

Now I am now leading the opposition and the opposition has now become the government. So I am not changing my stand first I say that I still see have the same old ideas about the authoritarian rule which I might been accused of being dictator during my time. But I beg to differ I was not a dictator but that doesn't make anybody change their minds. Whenever they mention my name they always described me as a dictator and today a dictator is going to talk about democracy. But I don't know whether I'm qualified or not. But I will try.

In the first place of course democracy is not an Asian invention it came from the west. Again I suppose from Greece but now the whole world has been told that you have to become democratic else has seen rapid changes taking place in many places.

And as a result of trying to be democratic they have met worst fate then when they were under authoritarian rule. So does that mean that authoritarian rule is best. Well of course we deny that because we think that the only system of government that should be practised by all countries must be the democratic system. But democracy is not something easy to handle. The basic rules of course is that the majority of the people have a right to choose a government to govern their

country. But even in a democracy there can be autocrat to rule rather tightly as I have been accused of. But if you want to make government work you have to have certain disciplines.

Asian minds are not accustomed to the idea that country can be ruled by the people. We have always had monarchs with absolute power and we have survived in a way of course. There were a lot of criticism again the monarchies rule they tend to be rather cruel to their own people in order to sustain themselves.

But now Asian are told that they should have democracy. And democracy mean not having any monarch or any dictator. It is people who will choose their leaders would lead the country. The assumption of course is that the majority of the people must know what is good for themselves.

Unfortunately they are distracted by other things like money for example. If they're given money some of them would vote for whoever gives money whether he is a democrat or he is an authoritarian ruler. So sometimes or rather quite often it happens that democratically elected ruler can behave like a dictator and that's what happened to Malaysia since 2013 when the Prime Minister who has been ousted took over. He introduced into democracy a new slogan and that slogan is called Cash is King.

In other words he's saying that it is legitimate and proper to bribe in order to do to get anything done. But prime ministers are not paid very well. I think if you are in the public sector doing business you're better paid. But for Prime Minister who is running whole country the pay is very very low. So if you want to bribe and you don't have money he had to think of some ways to get money. And the previous Prime Minister decided that he would steal the money because he hasn't got enough money to give bribes which will change the minds of people.

That show that even if we elect a ruler doesn't mean that he will behave himself. There are mechanism for removing ruler who is not fair who is cruel and all that but sometimes the whole system can be can be converted to the dictators ideas and they will carry out his instruction

because they know that they will be very well paid for that. So even in a democracy there can be dictators. And we find that when working with the democratic government too many people have got ideas which they think should be carried out by the government and because they had different ideas from the government we have opposition parties.

Opposition parties normally can only criticise the government but seldom they can overthrow the government or bring government down. Unless of course it is a two party system. But two party is not very democratic. It means some people will have to forget their own ideas their own ideals in order to be a part of the other party the opposition. Only if there is a united opposition can democracy, can there be election to form the government. But it is not easy to have just two parties because many people would believe that they they are the right people to form the government.

And so when you see the regime change taking place in the Arab countries they, every one of those people who campaign, who demonstrated in order to overthrow the authoritarian government every one of them felt that they were the ones who should be running the government. But they are not united they come from various parties and the only reason why they think the government should be brought down is because they think they would be able to rule after the government is overthrown. But there are so many people who wants to be the government and of course immediately after the overthrow of authoritarian ruler there be will quarrel among the people who overthrew him.

Because you belong to different parties with different ideas. The end result may be Civil War at least tension and instability in the country. And they see in some countries they lost the ability to run the country. They become Failed Nations because they kept on quarrelling quarrelling with each other and not getting any benefit at all from democracy.

So we cant claim democracy as if one size shoes which fix all because each country each people have their own cultures and some of their cultures are so strong that it is difficult for them to change from having a dictator of an absolute monarch and replacing him with someone you elect

merely by making a tick on the piece of paper. This is not common with them and therefore this idea can not be easily practise in many many countries in Asia and the Middle East. So we need to accept that democracy is not a perfect system it has his flaws but to make it work the mindset and the value system of the people must be capable of accepting rule by a person who is elected every 5 years. Sometimes of course it doesn't last 5 years or something may go on to rule the country for 5 terms.

But all these are still seen quite democratic but some will fail because of the quarrells that take place all the time with the people snapping at the government and the government spending time and money in order to govern the country. He will not be able to govern in the country because he has to face a lot of disruptions coming from the very people who elected him.

So in Asia today we find not too many democracies. India is supposed to be the biggest democracy and but the others are quite totalitarian such as kingdom and countries of central Asia. In the east of course although leaders may be elected the ability to rule is not so good because of the constant sniping at the ruler whoever he may be. So the future of democracy in in Asia I think well will be something that will will not be achieve overnight as happens with some of the Middle Eastern countries. They change over night and today we see more problems than it was before they had democracy. You see civil war you see a lot of fighting and you'll see a lot of disruption of the environment and they are unable to rule well or to get others to come and invest in their countries.

So I hope that people will understand that it takes time for people to become democratic. The value system must be suitable for democracy before democracy it self can be used as a method of running a country.

Thank you very much.

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